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Poland

Biotechnology

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Report Highlights:
Although the EC accepted MON 810 corn for planting, in a move designed to protect Poland's reputation as a "natural" agricultural producer, the Government of Poland introduced a two-year moratorium on planting Genetically Modified (GM) products in Poland. Poland's restrictions on all non-pharmaceutical GM products are a major non-tariff trade barrier. Legislation specifying the requirements for coexistence of GM cultivations with conventional and organic crops was rejected by Parliament in 2004.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
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[PL]

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I Executive Summary

Poland's restrictions on all non-pharmaceutical Genetically Modified (GM) products are a major non-tariff trade barrier. Currently, Poland follows most European Union regulations regarding GM products. Legislation specifying the requirements for coexistence of GM cultivations with conventional and organic crops was rejected by Parliament in 2004. As Parliamentary elections will be held in September 2005 there is little chance that new legislation will be passed in the near future.

II Biotechnology Trade and Production

Poland currently does not produce or import any GM crops nor are any under development; however, there are valid import permits for protein concentrates based on GM soybeans for feed production. Additionally, in March 2005, the Polish Government implemented a two-year moratorium on the trade and planting of MON 810 maize.

III Biotechnology Policy

Descriptive Information on the Regulatory Framework

There are many Ministries and departments responsible for the import and handling of food products in Poland. The Polish Sanitary Inspectorate is responsible for ensuring that food products are safe for human consumption. This Inspectorate analyzes foodstuffs before it enters commercial channels. Through November 2004, 100 companies, including wholesalers and processors, were inspected for potential GM content. The Veterinary Inspectorate is in charge of testing animal feed for GMOs. In 2005, Veterinary Inspectorate plans to inspect 160 samples of animal feed. The Inspector of Commercial Quality of Food and Agricultural Products is responsible for border control of imported food products and the Plant Protection Inspector for imported seeds and plant protection agents.

Currently, Poland follows the European Union's regulations on traceability and labeling (Regulation (EC) No 1830/2003). The complete EU regulation can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2003/l_268/l_26820031018en00240028.pdf

Poland also follows the Cartagena Protocol regarding biosafety and biodiversity. More information on the protocol can be found on page six of this report; for the complete text of the Protocol see http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety/protocol.asp

List of Approved Biotech Crops and Field Testing of Biotech Crops

There are currently no GM crops approved for planting in Poland; however, a few permits for field and laboratory research have been issued. Valid permits are still held for lettuce, potatoes, plums, flax, cucumbers, and rape.

Coexistence

In July 2003, the European Commission (EC) published guidelines outlining strategies and best practices for allowing genetically modified crops to grow alongside conventional and organic crops. These guidelines suggest that a general EU-wide approach is not workable and allows individual countries to set their own policy. Polish authorities have stated on several occasions that they are unable to establish and maintain regulatory control of coexistence due to budget constraints.

Legislation specifying the requirements that must be met for coexistence of GM cultivations with conventional and organic crops prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture was rejected by Parliament in 2004. As Parliamentary elections will be held in September 2005 there is little chance that new legislation will be passed in the near future.

Generally, farm groups fear that coexistence will jeopardize profitable sales to Western Europe, specifically the European Union. The EC policy states that farmers who introduce EU-authorized GM crops will bear the responsibility for ensuring that there is no contamination of conventional crops. Even though Monsanto's 810-corn variety has been approved for planting in the EU, none can be planted in Poland until there are regulations in place governing coexistence.

According to a March 2004 report on coexistence of GM and conventional crops prepared by the Antama Foundation, Spanish researchers found that coexistence of GM crops is possible if certain conditions are applied. The findings are based on the results of field trials completed in 2003, which analyzed the presence of the Bt gene according to wind direction at levels of 0.2 percent to 0.9 percent.

Labeling

According to EU regulations all products whether genetically modified or containing GM ingredients must be labeled; however, the adventitious presence of up to 0.9 percent of an EU-approved GM ingredients is acceptable without a label. The words "This product contains genetically modified organisms" or "This product contains genetically modified [name of organism(s)]" must appear on the label of prepackaged foods or on the display of non-prepackaged foods.

The Inspectorate for Commercial Quality of Food and Agricultural Products is responsible for ensuring that bulk products are labeled in accordance with government requirements.

In addition, the amended GMO Act, which is currently being reviewed by the Polish government, will delegate specific agency and/or Ministry responsibility for traceability and labeling inspection. There are currently no regulations delegating these responsibilities.

Biosafety Protocol

Poland is a signatory of the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety and biodiversity. The Protocol sets out the basics for the import, export, and handling of living Genetically Modified Organisms that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and human, animal, and environmental health. The Ministry of the Environment, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, is the lead agency in charge of the implementation and regulation of the Protocols.

For exporters the protocol dictates that the Polish government must be notified, in writing, before shipping any non-pharmaceutical GM products. Additionally, exporters of live GMOs are required to conduct a risk assessment of their product and have a risk management plan in place.

For the complete text of the Cartagena Protocol see
http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety/protocol.asp

Biotechnology Trade Barriers

There are now 10 GMO-free regions in Poland covering more than two-thirds of Poland's territory and population; however, local authorities are not empowered to make laws excluding GMOs from their regions. These proclamations do not have any legal repercussions and yet, they are important to note from a social and economic perspective. However, more important is Poland's notification to the EC that it would implement a two-year moratorium on planting GMO varieties in Poland due to the lack of a regulation on coexistence and insufficient knowledge about the health effects of GMO product consumption.

Pending Legislation

In March 2005 Poland announced that it plans to ban the import and planting of 17 varieties of genetically modified MON 810 maize seed made by U.S. biotech firm Monsanto for two years. While MON 810 is approved for cultivation across the EU-25, individual countries have discretion on whether to allow it and other GM crops on their national territory. However, it is important to note that a similar request by the Austrian Parliament was rejected by the EC due to a lack of evidence proving a negative influence of GM plants on the environment.

Overview of Biotechnology Issues Regarding The European Union

Polish regulations are inline with the EU; however, they can be even more restrictive in the approval process of GM crop varieties.

IV Marketing Issues

Market Acceptance of Biotech Food

Currently there is no marketing or promotion of Genetically Modified food in Poland.

Media

Biotechnology is not an issue that excites most Poles. From time to time an article about GM food or experiments is published. Also, important events in biotechnology are noted by the media but neither in length nor on the front page.

The media is a critical source of information on biotechnology. Over 85 percent of Poles get their information on GMOs from television, 26 percent from newspapers, 24 percent from the radio, and 14 percent from popular science magazines. Of those who get their information from popular science magazines 41 percent have the sense of being well informed, whereas those who obtain information from Television feel insufficiently informed.

Consumers

Based on a February 2003 opinion poll of 1,007 Polish adults conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center for the Plant Breeding and Acclimatization Institute, around one-third had not heard of biotechnology and only 17 percent were interested in the issue. Almost half (49 percent) of Poles had heard about biotechnology but did not pay much attention to it. Only 19 percent of the population felt sufficiently informed on the issue of biotechnology. People having basic vocational education (82 percent), inhabitants of rural areas (81 percent), people over-thirty (80 percent), farmers (90 percent), and respondents who are not interested in politics (81 percent) admit that they are insufficiently informed on the issues.

Of those who knew or have heard about biotechnology, most accept the use of biotechnology for environmental protection purposes (almost 80 percent) and for pharmaceutical and

medical research (75 percent). Also, 30 percent of society supports the use of biotechnology in food production, 34 percent would rather ban it, and 36 percent are uncertain. Poles think regardless of the purpose of biotechnology developments, it must be regulated and controlled by the government. Compared to studies conducted in 2000, Polish support for biotech research is declining and the feeling that human health and the environment are endangered by biotechnology is growing.

Most of the population believes that traditional methods of breeding should be continued instead of changing genetic traits of plants and animals. Also, 66 percent of those polled believe that biotech regulations will not be observed and that regulations are not sufficient to protect people against modern biotechnology risks.

Scientific Community

Research in Poland is undergoing a difficult period. Government funding is very limited while private funds are often unavailable. Hoping for future improvement, a group of biotechnology scientists created the Polish Biotechnology Federation, which has gathered together the eminent scholars and scientists involved in biotechnology in Poland. The federation's aim is the development of Polish biotechnology, as well as promoting it among the population.

The Second National Congress on Biotechnology in June 2002 in Lodz, Poland involved 500 participants. There was great interest in biotechnology but primarily for medical purposes. Currently, 21 university degree programs in biotechnology exist throughout the country and approximately 5,000 students are enrolled in them. However, because of the declining business prospects in agricultural biotechnology these graduates have limited in-country opportunities.

Farm Organizations

Farm organizations are mostly opposed to GM crops. Many of these organizations represent small-scale farmers, which, due to prohibitively high costs, could not adopt GM crops and thus fear the competition posed by larger farmers who could benefit from the technology. Additionally, all farmers are concerned that GM crop production will threaten their sales prospects within the EU, stimulate over production and reduce prices, and threaten domestic sales where there is a strong traditional consumer belief that Polish food products are "natural." However, there are farmers who say they would breed modified corn if they could find buyers. They realize the potential for lower costs and higher profits. Unfortunately, they are not very active in promoting or supporting modified seed producers because of sales risk concerns.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

There are a limited numbers of NGOs in Poland. NGO expansion and their role in the GMO debate should increase in the next few years as they become eligible for EU NGO funding.

The Genetically Modified Food Information Office was established in 1999 to promote biotech food. They organize many events for journalists, students, and the public. They are a good source of information about biotechnology in Poland and abroad. Unfortunately, their funding sources are diminishing and they may be forced to close.

Another organization, the Foundation for Polish Agriculture Development (FDPA), organized a series of successful lectures on biotechnology in different towns across Poland. Poland's

Institute for Sustainable Development expresses more concern about biotechnology because of its fears of it limiting biodiversity.

The Consumer Federation and the Food Processors Federation try to inform consumers as objectively as possible about biotechnology. Both organizations advocate clear, yet not prohibitive, protective consumer regulations.

V Capacity Building and Outreach

U.S. Government Funded Outreach Activities

FAS Warsaw has done much to promote GM products and to educate Poles about them. Within the last eight years, six journalists have visited the U.S. as participants in the International Visitors program on biotechnology. Representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Health have also participated in agricultural biotechnology seminars sponsored by the Cochran Fellowship Program. Additionally, FAS Warsaw has sponsored, or has otherwise been involved with, numerous workshops and seminars on biotechnology for decision makers, university students, and journalists.

Country Needs

Poland needs to be better educated on biotechnology. The majority of the population is ill informed on the topic of biotechnology and as long as this continues, biotechnology will continue to be more of a political than a scientific issue.

VI Reference Material

Ministry of Environment,
Department of Nature Protection,
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www.minrol.gov.pl

Plant Quarantine and Seed Inspection (Ministry of Agriculture),
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www.piorin.gov.pl

Main Sanitary Inspection (Ministry of Health),
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Opinion Poll Results
http://www.ihar.edu.pl/gf2716/index_en.php

The Ministry of Environment has regulatory oversight functions on matters dealing with GMOs. This Ministry also coordinates work on biodiversity management. www.mos.gov.pl

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is responsible for implementing regulations regarding food safety with the assistance of the Ministry of Health. Both of these Ministries advise the Ministry of Environment on GMO-related matters.
http://www.minrol.gov.pl

The Horticulture Research and Development Center (COBORU) is responsible for plant variety protection and pre-registration testing of breeding varieties.
http://www.coboru.pl/aindex.htm

The European Biotechnology Federation and the Biotechnology Committee of the Polish Academy of Science has sponsored a Genetically Modified Food Information Office in Poland.
http://www.infogmo.edu.pl/